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Transforming the Sexist City: Non-Sexist Communities of Practice (invited paper)

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Introduction

Walk around any city in the world and you will observe well entrenched patriarchal systems etched deep into the urban fabric. Monumental architecture and statues to the 'founding fathers' often provide the most immediate testimony to the historic domination of a wealthy white, male ruling elite (Jarvis et al. 2009). Yet, the sexist city is not simply the legacy of a bygone era and, paradoxically, it is harder to 'read' than is at first suggested from this monumental scale. The depth and extent of this sexism can be difficult to discern, not because the evidence is subtle or hidden but instead because it is everywhere routinely normalized and, by the same token, rendered of little account (Bondi 1998). Unravelling this paradox opens up space, not only for critical feminist enquiry, but also for niche demonstration intentional communities of practice and progressive feminist teaching. Rather than to concede a 'hopeless' legacy of patriarchy, this paper argues that direct engagement with the sexist city, through field-based epistemologies and methodologies, provides the ideal stimulus for transformation. Furthermore, it is argued that transformation has to be understood in a more nuanced way than is usually the case, beyond opposition, as a combined processes of resisting, imagining, feeling, reflecting and acting mindfully around patriarchy and prejudice. For any progressive transformation to effect change, such as to incubate gender mainstreaming and inclusive urban development, there must be combined critical and creative thought and practice.

The following discussion introduces this intertwining of resistance and reimagining through a utopian method of thinking differently about, and envisioning, alternative urban futures. This challenges the tendency in orthodox urban studies to neglect the role of women and gender, where the focus is on 'top down' global neoliberal narratives, building instead on a recent resurgence of interest in the social and political spaces of everyday life and a revival of citizenship in civil society. New forms of citizenship coincide with diverse expressions of direct action including practices

associated with community-led urban regeneration (Isin 2002: 265). In this context it is necessary but not sufficient to call attention to the contested terrains of women's claims-making in 'rights to the city' urban social movements (Staeheli 2008). Additional theorizing needs to draw on a hopeful urban imaginary that translates strategies of resistance into an actually existing alternative practices and realities. This paper consequently argues that the sexist city should be reconceived as a 'place to think with': to do this, discussion turns first to a scale of inter-personal imagination associated with intentional egalitarian communities of practice; then to the transformative role of feminist teaching and learning. In this sense, the topic in question is as much about the nature of transformation, as a paradigmatic *process of thinking differently*, or 'otherwise' (Levitas 2013), as it is about the phenomenon of urban space being constructed and segregated by gendered bodies and power relations of domination and subordination.

This paper is structured in three parts. The first part introduces a well-rehearsed critique of the sexist city. This illustrates not only the enduring legacy of androcentric urbanism but also how this persists in the commercial exploitation of gendered and sexed bodies in contemporary urban public space, such as through sexist imagery and fear of sexually motivated violence (Rosewarne 2007). For example, findings from the *International Violence Against Women Survey* (IVAWS) show that violence against women remains prevalent in every country studied and among all age and socio-economic groups of women: sexual violence tends to occur with the same or greater frequency as physical violence (Whitzman et al. 2013: 7). These observations are qualified by recognition of the valuable work underway in a number of progressive (women's) planning networks and urban social movements claiming rights to the city (Staeheli et al. 2013; Jarvis et al. 2009: 291). The second part addresses an identified gap in the literature on the sexist city by first imagining and enacting what a non-sexist community of practice might look and feel like on the ground. The 'hopeful' power of transformation is suggested in two interdependent scales of action represented as intertwined threads of thought and practice; first through niche demonstration projects of intentional egalitarian community (Seyfang 2010; Wenger and Synyder 2000); second with the role of education, notably feminist teaching and learning and the significance of critical scholarship that motivates and drives all the other transformation processes. The paper concludes with a suggested agenda for continuing research at the interface of cities, gender and transformation.

The sexist city

Historically the planning and development of cities has derived from a supremely masculinized belief system that emphasises the male-dominated sectors of economic activity in the city and elsewhere. This legacy of struggle over space and representation, between the masculine City-as-Citadel and feminine City-as-Garden, dates back to the Platonic ideals of Grecian philosophy and even further, to the ancient city-forms of the Middle East (Akkerman 2006). While social and material structures of patriarchy are shown to persist, we are also reminded from the utopian studies literature that these are paradigmatic struggles, including imaginary accounts of the ideal city, rather than a polarised 'battle of the sexes'. Thus, according to Akkerman 2013: 733) in Book V of the Republic, Plato advocates equality for women by implying a role for women in the 'upper echelon' 'guardian class' while at the same time understanding 'idealised' femininity and masculinity as essentially determined by a masculine structure to the cosmos. Plato opens up a space for thinking about equality while at the same time explaining and justifying a sex-segregated hierarchy of intellectual and political elites as essentially given. Similarly, in his fabled island of Utopia, Thomas More's (1516) description of 'a city of open spaces rather than mere buildings' with 'communalism and altruism' appears to modify the effects of a ruling hierarchy, applying a hopeful feminist imaginary, while maintaining an otherwise structural account of male domination (Akkerman 2013: 734).

A tendency to contrast the positive science of a rational urban order against a cosy rural idyll frames the anti-urban bias identified in classical urban sociology. This way, for Georg Simmel the alienating 'logic' of capitalism and patriarchy arouses yearning for a lost, more harmonious rural past which, like More's Utopia, hints at a feminist critique while failing to enact a politics of social transformation. This binary conception has been heavily criticised by feminist scholars not only for the assumptions of a masculinist ontology but also for the way it fails to acknowledge the tenacity and powerful ties of working-class industrial communities (McDowell 1999: 100). We have come to associate this tenacity with the 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985) of creative coping. At the same time, these classical utopian paradigms inspire movement toward urban social change. Thus we find aspects of contrast theory in the otherwise enlightened Garden Cities movement and in the philosophy of its founder Ebenezer

Howard who spoke out against the pollution, congestion and social dislocation of the modern industrial city.

It is nevertheless crucial to recognise that the official account of urban studies has been constructed as *history*, overpowering *herstory*. Ebenezer Howard's vision of inclusive urban design, for example, was directly inspired by the socialist feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Yet Gilman's intervention remains largely unacknowledged. Due to his male privilege and his architectural training, Howard was able to exploit Gilman's ideas in the construction of his Garden Cities and elaborated on them through influential publications. By contrast Charlotte Perkins Gilman achieved limited impact when she published *The Man-Made World or Our Androcentric Culture* in 1911, and *Herland* in 1915. Ultimately her ideas inspired a range of utopian experiments in urban design, including 'stripped down' living quarters supplemented by central kitchens, family hotels and serviced blocks as well as examples from around the world of more collective, ideological and matriarchal communities, including the cohousing concept that has attracted popular interest since the 1970s (Roberts 1991; Fromm 1991; Fromm 2000). Thus, Gilman's critique of androcentrism opened up space for thinking creatively about alternative ways of living.

Alongside the suggestion that utopian ideals have reflected critically on hegemonic masculinities in the construction of, and writing about, cities; it can also be observed that critical and creative thinking has surfaced in a widespread turn from 'macro' to more 'micro' methods and fields of research interest. From the early twentieth century this took the form of street-level ethnographies that drew attention to everyday social interactions and encounters in urban public life. The classical sociology of Ferdinand Tönnies, for example, emphasised the qualitative significance of close knit associations of 'gemeinschaft' (community), contrasting these with the 'gesellschaft' (alienation) of the crowded city street. George Simmel, a contemporary of Tönnies, further conceptualised this scale of inclusive belonging by recognising the need for playful, creative association. Simmel pointed to the universal occurrence in human development of a sociable pleasure in the physical company of others (what he calls *Geselligkeit*) that could be further deepened through social awareness and empathy. To Simmel, the virtue of *Geselligkeit* is that engagement runs deep, beyond fleeting impressions. Nevertheless, at this time urban public life was typically defined by a distinctly masculine urbane sensibility in the figure of the *flâneur*. As John Rennie Short

(2006: 39) reminds us, the voyeuristic flâneur was quite specifically a *gentleman* stroller of the city. Accordingly, Elizabeth Wilson (1995: 65) observes that the flâneur 'represents men's visual and voyeuristic mastery over women, (his) freedom to wander at will through the city is essentially a masculine freedom'.

The early industrial European and North American cities were constructed to a large extent through clear architectural distinctions between residential areas and sites of industry, commerce and government. Residential areas were spatially separated, designed for (not by) women as the domain in which 'respectable women' were expected to display feminine skills of home-making - subject to the authority of the husband. Architects and planners were complicit in this segregation by the way that they 'kept women in their place' through comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances that were variously hostile and insensitive to women's needs (Knox and Pinch 2006: 140). Marion Roberts (1991: 6) maintains that cities remain quite literally 'man-made' because of a historically entrenched mix of state policy and cultural expectations regarding family life, gender relations, public health and motherhood. Even in the 21st century, it can be argued that male-bias remains endemic to Euro-American cities because the urban construction professions are dominated by middle class white men. Research by the UK Centre for Education in the Built Environment, while 38 per cent of students accepted onto architecture courses are female, women make up only 15% of architects practising the profession five years after graduation (CEBE 2006: 9). The persistence of the problem is revealed in UK government data from the Architects Registration Board: the proportion of women making up the profession's registered architects dropped from 28% in January 2009 to 21% in December 2011 (Architects Journal, 2012). Poor retention is widely attributed to an uncompromising studio culture which promotes personal sacrifice and commitment to the project through late nights, long working hours and the promotion of conflict through individual competitiveness. This echoes a similar 'always on' culture of long working hours in male-dominated digital media career trajectories (Jarvis and Pratt 2006). Architectural practice by necessity interacts with the cultures of other professions within the building industry, and is influenced by normative attitudes to a host of issues, including women in practice (Salter et al., 2012: 5).

Towards inclusive infrastructures of daily life

It is illuminating to consider the urban bias that underscores the pursuit of modernity, and yearning for a more harmonious rural past, alongside the post-industrial proliferation of new media technologies and the apparently futile quest for 'balance' between home, work and family life. Issues of 'balance' have been addressed in urban studies literature with reference to the rise of a network society (Castells 1996) whereby new information and communication technologies allow virtual or time-shifted transactions to replace inter-personal interactions. In theory it is possible to squeeze more 'productive' activity into each working day (Schor 1992). From a time-geographical perspective, Davies (2001) argues that emphasis on time as a quantity-based resource (equally available to all as a measure of the calendar or clock) and space as a gender-neutral, fearless dimension, obscures important social processes that explain why cities remain gendered in their construction and spatial arrangement resides with the (false) separation of discrete functions of production, consumption and social reproduction. Social reproduction covers all those activities that are fundamental to the continued maintenance of human life (subsequent generations) and social existence. What it actually takes to reproduce cities and daily life goes far beyond biological reproduction to encompass all of the mundane, typically unpaid (and disregarded), activities of feeding, clothing, sheltering and caring/ fetching, carrying and caring. In reality, household members engage in 'multiple economies' in order to secure income, domestic reproduction, raise children, and care for the disabled, frail and sick. They work formally and informally, in many economic spaces outside and inside their homes, do paid and unpaid work, produce and exchange goods, services and emotional care (Jarvis 2005: 85-6).

Reconsidering urban infrastructures from an everyday life perspective calls for both gender mainstreaming and an integrated understanding of all that it takes in a practical sense for individuals and households to 'go on' from one day to the next. This framework encompasses structures, capabilities and contingency. Structural constraints determine what is actually available as a possible course of action in a given situation. Capabilities include the temporal and spatial 'grain' of provision including when and where the buses run, when the shops are open, how safe the streets appear, parking restrictions, traffic congestion and so on. The distribution and use of these infrastructural networks arguably vary from person to person and in direct relation to

the activity concerned. Attending to what is possible in the spacing and timing of daily life highlights the contingency of these routines and strategies of coping. It exposes the potential for fragile daily routines to be disrupted by external events, constrained by the need to co-ordinate movements with others and made uncertain by gaps or delays in infrastructure networks.

A constructive starting point for ongoing feminist critique of the sexist city is the Nordic feminist housing and building project 'New Everyday Life' (Forskargruppen) (Gullestad 1991), where the vision of a more harmonious, creative and just society draws attention to unequal relations within the household, civil society and polity as the basis for imagining a non-sexist alternative (Hayden 1981; 1984; Matrix 1984; Roberts 1991). Other advocates of progressive planning include EuroFEM, a loose affiliation of European feminist scholars committed to promoting and implementing gender mainstreaming in planning policy, job creation and local initiatives, models of participatory engagement, and the reorganising of everyday life around housing, drawing on historic ideals of collective living (Booth and Gilroy 1998; Darke et al. 1994; see also Matrix 1984). The EuroFEM Toolkit is a collection of participatory and culturally sensitive methods and stories taken from women's projects across Europe, from southern as well as northern contexts, which can be used to build capacity for collaborative planning (Horrelli et al. 1998; 2000). These groups share in common a critical distancing from the criteria of profitability, competitiveness, and engineering efficiency traditionally applied to urban development and planning.

On transformation

As already noted, the sexist city has not gone unchallenged. Notions of gender mainstreaming, participatory democracy and sustainable livelihoods have all developed rapidly over the last twenty years as analytical narratives through which to reposition marginalized groups and communities in an effort to remedy persistent exclusions and bias. In mainstream urban studies, notions of transformation are typically conflated with modernity, neoliberalism and economic and technological restructuring. This neglects the hidden power of transformation enacted by the marginalised 'other'. The ongoing challenge for feminist urban scholars today is to 'think through what a non-sexist or non-gender specific (non-androcentric) urban environment might look like' (McDowell 1999: 120). Overcoming the sexist city requires that feminist scholars influence (and

transform) the tone of debate and engagement with policy and planning. According to Sylvia Walby (2005: 323) a vision of transformation suggests 'neither the assimilation of women into men's ways, nor the maintenance of a dualism between women and men, but rather something new, a positive form of melding, in which the outsiders, feminists, change the mainstream'. The aim in this paper is to push this understanding further by engaging more explicitly with what this process of transformation actually entails in the sense of creative utopian as well as critical oppositional spaces of thinking, feeling, being and doing.

Here, inspiration is drawn from the way Ruth Levitas (2013) liberates the concept of utopia from a place and goal (of master planning), replacing it with a 'utopian method' of unsettling and challenging the dominant culture of the day, recognising that this process of imagining is prevalent and necessary (Levitas 2007, P.289). This method of thinking 'otherwise' rescues an inclusive grassroots resistance from a top-down blueprint. In effect, a utopian method of thinking is encountered in many ways within and beyond different communities of practice, such as those associated with niche demonstration initiatives and those cultivated in classroom teaching and learning. These encounters represent a neglected field of feminist theory and practice and a significant impetus for social change. Burr and Larsen (2010) also argue that in order for imagination to flow there has to be space for creativity and experimentation. This creative 'thinking space' is revealed to function through plural encounters including deep relationships between people and the physical landscape. On the one hand this might be explained in terms of convivial public spaces that open up inclusive participation in civil society initiatives. On the other hand we learn from the literature on women-only spaces and organisations that freedom to think for oneself or in non-violent dialogue with others requires a 'safe space' of 'authenticity and compassion' in which to 'restore' capacity for human flourishing, including ways of imagining alternative possibilities (Jarvis et al. 2009: 19).

By critically engaging with the notion of utopia as a method of analysis it is possible to rescue multiple geographies of activism that are enacted through participation in the 'craft skills' of cooperative community (De Angelis 2003; Sennett 2012). Crucially, this shift in emphasis increases rather than eliminates the significance of space and place. Thus, in addition to utopian thinking, it is argued that closer interdependence of urban studies with gender studies should critically engage with the

enacted geographies of activism. Most current theorising on resistance (e.g. anti-globalisation) draws attention to public demonstration, individual activists and trans-local social movements. This tends to consign women's activism in and around the home and community to individual, parochial expressions of work-life 'balance'. One way of rescuing these domestic and community spaces of utopian thinking from neglect is to draw attention to actually existing collaboration in non-traditional domestic arrangements, as inhabited 'living laboratories' of social change and urban transformation. The notion of collective housekeeping introduced above in Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities is one example. More recently, new forms of collaborative housing (such as cohousing) suggest new forms of citizenship and critical and creative non-sexist alternatives. Crucially, rather than to function as island enclaves of opposition, these inhabited milieu better represent a common asset; a 'thinking sphere' of inspiration.

Niche demonstrations of intentional community

The 'soft infrastructures' of Simmel's concept of *Geselligkeit*, introduced above, as well as more recent discourse on gender mainstreaming, are clearly implicated in collaborative housing experiments and collective housekeeping. No one arrives at intentional community by accident. Even to hear a radio programme on the topic, or attend a town-hall meeting, or make enquiries of an email contact, there has to be the kernel of orientation or 'leaning towards' particular questions and ideas (Ahmed 2006). Orientations are not sprung out of nowhere; they are socially and geographically constructed; they are preconscious to the individual but they then evolve through the dynamic of group negotiated (felt and experienced) intentionality. When a group of people set out to construct and manage their immediate built environment with the intention of sharing amenities and making decisions collectively, more is at stake than material and economic goods: significant 'soft' inter-personal capabilities are called into being. From the literature on intentional communities we learn that degrees of sharing vary, from the highest level of income sharing (what is often labelled a *commune* or *kibbutz*) (Manzella 2010), to looser arrangements combining private and shared resources (such as with cooperatives, eco-villages and cohousing) (Jarvis 2011).

Cohousing is one type of intentional community made up of private homes with additional shared facilities in which residents actively participate in the design, planning

and governance of the community as a whole. The contemporary cohousing concept is inspired by the Swedish 'kollektivhus' and a similar Danish 'living together apart' arrangement known as *bofællesskab* dating from the late 1960s (Vestbro 1997) but it captures the enduring ideals of a much longer communal imagination. Swedish cohousing in particular emerged from a concerted effort to bring about greater equality between men and women and to support dual earning and caring roles (Vestbro and Horelli 2013). Common meals and other services were designed to reduce the burden of housework and to make it possible to combine personal careers based on paid employment with family and community life. In the many places around the world where the cohousing concept has taken root, commitment to shared meals is widely held as the benchmark of gender-democratic shared housekeeping.

Existing studies acknowledge that intentional communities represent 'laboratories for testing and demonstrating new ideologies and social structures' (Forster 1998: P.39; Crabtree 2005). Yet, there is limited understanding of the creative experimentation actually entailed in building a shared space and community, including the tacit communication skill required to make decisions by democratic consensus through collective self-governance. For example, experiments in non-sexist intentional communities demonstrate a depth and intensity of dialogue and narratives of self-realization and deliberation that rarely arise in mainstream society where urban neighbourhoods are characterised by the preservation of private property and individualism. In conventional urban studies, 'innovation' is typically construed instrumentally as a function of efficiency and competitiveness, influenced by institutional actors and technologies that deliver tangible (monetised) value to urban regeneration. Less well understood are the characteristics and processes of interpersonal capability required in communities of practice to address 'structural transformations in the world political economy within a civic context of justice responsibility and care' (Wekerle 2013: 249). This resonates with an understanding of male-bias in the way that 'work' and 'worth' are circumscribed in dominant public discourse by reporting only those activities and qualities that 'count' as economically productive. Efforts to critique and transform systematic gender bias in the international standard of measuring economic growth, and the ways in which women's unpaid work have been excluded from what counts as 'productive' in the economy have contributed

to a significant and growing body of feminist scholarship (Waring 1990; Campbell 2014).

Intentional community groups adopt non-hierarchical, non-violent methods of conversation that follow tacit rules. Establishing a space of deep engagement resonates with what Kittay (1999) and others identify as 'love, care and solidarity' that are attitudes and activities that involve 'work' as well as availability: just as someone can be 'present' but emotionally unavailable, the emotion-work of group encounters (quintessential invisible labour) can remain unequally distributed in an otherwise equal setting (Lynch et al. 2009, 1, 31). Encounters are sustained through the phenomenon of conversation, the systematic properties of which entail patterns of opening and closing and turn-taking (Giddens 1984, 73). Adherence to democratic turn-taking is necessary but arguably not sufficient to cultivate cooperation. This is because there are two sorts of conversation, the dialectic and the dialogic (Sennett 2012, 18). Accordingly, in the dialectic conversation the aim in any oppositional exchange of views (debate) is to eventually reach a common understanding. In this conversational form, often viewed as a verbal duel, superior skills of practice entail the interpretation of intent (exposing what the other person assumes but does not say) expressed as an argument for action. Dialectic conversation tends to be associated with hierarchical socio-spatial relations.

In the dialogic conversation 'misunderstandings and cross purposes come into play; doubts are put on the table; people then have to listen harder to one another' (Sennett 2012, 19).

Conscientious listening is central to the common practice of sitting in a 'tribal council circle' that many forming groups practice as a means of open communication. Originally derived from indigenous cultures and widely adopted in the Quaker movement, this open forum was adopted with particularly cathartic affect in the counter-cultural peace camps (Roseneil 1995). In a tribal council circle, a talking stick is passed around from member to member allowing only the person holding the stick to speak. This enables all those present to be heard, especially those who would feel intimidated by adversarial debate. In theory at least, meeting in the circle, where there is no up or down, beginning or end, a non-hierarchical culture is enshrined which promotes openness towards each other's concerns and emphasis on non-judgemental experimentation.

In dialogic conversations, intentions are not exposed as right or wrong but submerged in a nascent state of coming into being. The statement and re-statement of intent (bouncing ideas off other people) does not necessarily resolve itself by finding common ground; instead the process expands awareness of divergent views and remains open to new experimental ideas. The dialogic process implies repeated practice or rehearsal of individual interests and experiences, not in a mechanically repetitive way, but rather, by invoking a 'transitional affect' which makes coordination and cooperation possible over time (Sennett 2012, 12). For many groups 'open' dialogue can feel too challenging and the potential for creative experimentation is consequently stifled by superficially democratic turn-taking. Arguably, intentional community groups require not only open and meaningful dialogue but also scope for lively and playful association. Practised effectively, openness can stimulate creative solutions that are not simply the function of repeated practice. This resonates with the connection that Ahmed (2006, 157) makes between vitality (as an expression of sociality) and disorientation. In lively dialogues, Ahmed (2006, 157) highlights the creative potential to unlock the direction of orientation, observing that 'moments of disorientation are vital'. Similarly, Sennett (2012, 38) observes that 'sociality is not an active reaching out to others; it is mutual awareness instead of action together'.

Perhaps inevitably, evidence from the historical record and contemporary demonstration communities reveal a mixed picture of gender democracy. The social scale relations of sharing, collaboration and consensus governance are complex, fragile and difficult to 'engineer'. Emphasis on non-violent consensus-based communication can reinforce gender separated rather than inclusive egalitarian group settings. The social and material networks that cultivate conviviality and sharing in a consensus community are not always benign or sufficient to combat persistent gender inequalities. Even when ideological commitments to gender equality are widespread in the intentional community group, gender divisions can be normalised and taken for granted by the way democratic social relations and cooperation are enacted. While sexist attitudes are challenged in outward displays, persistent gender imbalances are witnessed in the taken for granted undervaluation of the emotional labour most frequently constructed as 'women's work'. Nevertheless, viewed as a journey rather than a destination, demonstration intentional communities represent a plausible shift toward

fundamentally rethinking how and where people live, to promote sustainability and gender justice in the future.

Transformation in the classroom

According to Horelli (2002) 'gender mainstreaming' variously represents a policy, an approach, a philosophy, a mechanism, a strategy, and a method: it is a transformative process. The 'mainstream' that is being influenced includes less tangible cultural norms and assumptions (attitudes and minds) of governing institutions – including households and communities (see also Droste 2011). For Sylvia Walby (2005: 321) making sense of the contested issues bound up with the theory of gender mainstreaming requires that the (local) meaning of gender equality is addressed as well as the project of gender mainstreaming (Walby 2005: 321).

Ultimately, in order to transform the sexist city into a more progressive place, it is necessary to unsettle the attitudes, assumptions and practices underpinning the professional training of architects, designers, planners and local government officials. This calls for transformative teaching and learning that challenges normative assumptions and routine behaviour. Liz Bondi (2004: 175) has argued for instance that the transformative potential of feminist teaching and practice has been neglected and connections have too rarely been made between the *subject* of gender studies (or urban studies) and questions about *how* we teach feminism in the classroom (see also Valentine 1997). Techniques promoting 'feeling as learning' are presented to support the transition to environments built on an ethic of care (Jarvis 2009).

The links to classroom learning and feminist teaching are clear. To be transformative, efforts to alter the subject and method by which people-place urban interactions are viewed normatively need to be related to the capacity for gender mainstreaming in the classroom and in professional practice. It is entirely possible and appropriate to make gender interventions in the classroom and professional practice, to provoke personal and political transformation as an antidote to the instrumental pursuit of economic efficiencies and measurable learning objectives alone. Beyond existing guidance on feminist teaching practice, the point is to recognise that new ideas and learning rely less on a straightforward exchange of information than on shared experience. The classroom has to become a community of practice rooted in non-hierarchical collaboration and non-violent dialogue (Jarvis 2009). Following a utopian

method of thinking, channels of communication within this community of practice are better characterised by the power to enchant or inspire rather than to the exchange of information or conventional 'learning'. This is why transformation in the classroom is intimately bound up with the 'impulse' of desiring a different, better future.

This is a lesson that is usefully carried over from the commitment to gender democracy and diversity represented by intentional communities: it is a commitment best translated into effective practice through a strong community of reciprocal reliance and collective governance (Beall 1997). Conscientious listening is central to the 'non-violent' open dialogue adopted by the intentional communities in question and this combines with wider social learning. On the one hand gender democracy is manifest in terms of an absence of leadership, in a non-hierarchical gender division of labour and decision-making. On the other hand, in more subtle ways, egalitarian intentions are also are instilled in a culture of non-violent community and a shared ethos that commits individual members to challenge and rewrite oppressive and sexist language and behaviour in mainstream society. In this way, 'calm' communication, nurturing and compassionate language becomes the superior cultural capital intended to replace the taken for granted privilege and domination of loud, confident, aggressive or intimidating voices (Flanigan, 2011; xviii). Arguably, a non-violent community of practice should be instilled in university teaching and learning. In theory at least, meeting in the circle, where there is no up or down, beginning or end, a non-hierarchical culture is enshrined which promotes openness towards each other's concerns and emphasis on non-judgemental experimentation (Jarvis 2011). Yet, while intentional communities may be explicitly inclusive, the indication from existing empirical research is that the demographic profile at this small scale of belonging lacks representative diversity in terms of race, class and ethnicity. This is also true for the university classroom.

Here it is argued that practise-based teaching and learning can enable students to reflect empathetically on the tensions, paradoxes and concrete experiences underlying gender stereotypes/ sex-typing in their own and other people's lives. It is entirely possible and appropriate to make gender interventions in the classroom, town hall and conference; to provoke personal and political transformation as an antidote to the instrumental pursuit of measurable learning objectives (and competitiveness) alone. One approach is to push the practise of reflexive learning beyond the most commonly mobilised form of 'intellectual oversight' (Giddens 1991). This opens up transformative

potential by deploying concrete experiences (as interpreted through the medium of role play, diaries, field trips and participatory action research (see Kindon et al. 2008).

Recent urban planning scholarship and policy initiatives also demonstrate renewed commitment to public participation, emancipatory planning, deliberative democracy and 'mainstreaming' efforts to incorporate gender in urban planning (Rahder 1998; 1999; Healey 1997) along with a 'renaissance' in the kind of 'human scale' urban vernacular associated with cohousing. At present, many of the most economically 'successful' cities are hostile environments for families with young children. A first step is transformation in the classroom and in practitioner training and public participation. Transformation will come from a reintegration of a culture of care in public life where ruthlessly competitive structures are dismantled and replaced with soft infrastructures which support and enable the social reproduction work that ultimately maintains societies, livelihoods and an inclusive, gender democratic urban environment.

Concluding remarks

Sexism persists and is manifest in subtle ways (Valentine et al. 2014: 401). The androcentric origins of cities and urban studies are evident not only in the profile of classical urban scholars, including those men like Plato and More pronouncing on the utopian 'ideal', but also in the subject matter considered to be worthy of critical discussion (and thus transformation). Throughout history the dominant narratives have arguably been 'macho', 'macro' grandstand views of the city. Yet, rather than to concede a 'hopeless' legacy of patriarchy, this paper argues that direct engagement with the sexist city, through field-based epistemologies and methodologies

There is a growing trend in urban studies for a 'network society' to be traced through plural spatial scales, beyond 'the city' and 'the state', in response to the profound influence of global institutions and, associated with this, the global penetration and consequences of neoliberal restructuring and structural adjustment. Recognising multiple scales and shifting strategies of political engagement in the field of urban studies has generated greater appreciation of 'cracks in the totalizing narrative of globalization' and civil society initiatives mobilised to effect political and social change within everyday local struggles (Wekerle 2013: 245). A significant gender gap nevertheless remains between the androcentric discourse and explanations advanced in this production of knowledge- and the lived realities of women's urban movements and

their claim to rights, equality and social justice (Staeheli 2008). Yet, significantly, at a time when a global 'neopatriarchal and neoliberal matrix' appears more totalising than ever, there is evidence that the 'optimistic politics of feminism' continues effectively to demand an alternative to the sexist dominion of social spaces and democracies (Campbell 2013: 8, 91). The express aim of this paper, then, has been to extend the reach of feminist analysis beyond a spatial scale and politics of urbanism, to a method of thinking about transformation in ways that acknowledges the creative as well as critical 'soft' interpersonal skills entailed in realising communities of practice. This argument was developed with reference to a utopian method of thinking (Levitas 2013), viewed as an active, restless process (of doing, being, thinking, listening and co-creating) that involves radical attempts to bring about social change (Gorz 1999).

The discussion highlights that while shared space and collective self-management can summon forth new forms of citizenship, everyday practices of home-making remain deeply implicated in relations of paid and unpaid work and this has profound implications for dimensions of difference including gender, class, disability and age. Finding common ground with others calls for craft skills 'of cooperation and collaboration that have to be continually rehearsed through intensely reflexive processes of self-governance (Sennett 2012, x). This suggests a nuanced mix of individual activism combined with collective visioning and creative experimentation. Crucially, this implies the development of a 'soft' infrastructure of ingenuity in this experimental milieu which evolves from, and lubricates, collective activity and shared dwelling space (Jarvis et al. 2009, 133). This appears to align the creative process of collaborative dwelling with theories and practices of gender mainstreaming such as EuroFEM above. By emphasising the influence of self-organised group dialogue and structures of governance, this paper considers individual notions of commitment and affiliation, to reveal deeper patterns of meaning and ways of 'doing', performing and experiencing non-sexist societies and environments. In short, social dimensions are especially significant because individual intentions are bound up with those of others in a group, and the internal organisation of the group arguably lends contextual specificity to communities of practice, subjectivity and meaning.

Perhaps inevitably, evidence from the historical record and contemporary demonstration communities reveal a mixed picture. The social scale relations of sharing, collaboration and consensus governance are complex, fragile and difficult to 'engineer'.

Notwithstanding the recurring motivation of distaste for misogyny and materialism and enduring efforts to subvert the conventional nuclear family and single family home, we find paradoxical evidence to suggest that non-violent consensus-based communication can reinforce gender separated rather than inclusive egalitarian group settings. The social and material networks that cultivate conviviality and sharing in a consensus community setting are not always benign or sufficient to combat persistent gender inequalities.

Finally, by mobilising a utopian method of thinking it has been argued that closer interdependence of urban studies with gender studies should critically engage with the enacted geographies of activism. Recognising the co-constitution of cities and gender requires an integrated analysis of the 'material' and the 'social' which can only be achieved by tracing the circuits, networks and cultures of social reproduction which intersect and transcend discrete realms (such as 'home' 'work' 'family' and urban daily life) (Jarvis et al. 2009). Viewed in this integrated fashion, the home becomes something 'more than material', through the intersection of multiple economies and meanings, as a threshold to admit or exclude gender democracy and diversity. While acknowledging the contested nature of gender in this closer integration, it is important to confront persistent sexism; in the built environment, in communities of practice, and in classroom encounters. Valentine et al. (2014) suggest that we need to adopt new ways of seeing the sexism that remains so prevalent. Here, the argument has been to achieve this not only by witnessing and resisting the sexist city but also by imagining and realising non-sexist alternatives.

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